



State of Connecticut
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
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MEMBER
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Dear Senator Maynard, State Representative Guerra and esteemed members of the Transportation Committee, I am pleased to offer testimony on behalf of proposed H.B. No. 5546:

AN ACT CONCERNING VIOLATIONS OF HANDICAPPED PARKING LAWS

To eliminate the discretion of police to give a warning rather than a citation to violators of laws that are intended to reserve parking spaces for those with disabilities.

About 1 in 5 American have some kind of disability, and 1 in 10 have a severe disability. And, with the population aging and the likelihood of having a disability increasing with age, the growth in the number of people with disabilities can be expected to accelerate in the coming decades.

Our country and state have come a long way in the name of accessibility for the disabled. Still, much work remains to be done, especially in the area of handicapped parking enforcement.

I have become increasingly alarmed that handicapped parking spaces are becoming abused by those not in need of such accommodation.

At businesses, shops, restaurants and public facilities, there are those who continue to ignore the handicapped parking signs or just use it as a convenient idling site.

In my own community, there have been several recent troubling instances:

- At a high school football game this past Fall, tailgaters had set up their picnic across several handicapped spaces completely oblivious to the where they were parking.
- There is the person I witnessed at the post office who parked in the handicapped spot "just for a minute while I ran in to buy a stamp."
- And then there was a cleaning crew that parked outside a local bank in the handicapped space out front for four hours, telling me that they "had permission."

When law enforcement officials are called, offenders are more often than not given gentle warnings so they can drive away knowing that he or she can do it again with no more than a slap on the wrist.

In the name of all disabled who wish to live free, independent and unfettered as they conduct the day-to-day activities of their lives, we need to create stricter standards for the punishment for violating the handicapped parking laws.

We need to eliminate the discretion of police to give a warnings rather than a citation. We need to send a message to Americans with disabilities that they are not ancillary to society by integral and that they deserve equal access to handicapped parking spaces without fear that such access could be denied because the issue is not taken seriously.

Let's also send a message to potential violators that we do take it seriously and that a citation --*not a warning* --will be given every time they break this law. Thank you for your consideration.

With every good wish,

John K. Hampton